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8th House District

House Bill 127 Testimony Primary and Secondary Education Committee March 19, 2019

Chairman Blessing, Vice Chair Jones, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee. Thank you very much for providing us an opportunity to explain why state takeovers of public school districts should be stopped.

There are 611 public school districts in Ohio. As the members of this Committee are aware, Youngstown, Lorain and most recently East Cleveland City school districts have been taken over by state government as a result of House Bill 70 which was passed in the 131st General Assembly. I have the privilege of representing East Cleveland, so a large portion of my testimony will focus on that community.

East Cleveland

It is important to be mindful of the economic conditions in East Cleveland. A recent report said East Cleveland is the poorest community in Ohio and the 4th poorest city in the nation. The median household income in East Cleveland is \$19,953 whereas the median household income statewide is \$69,632.

According to Ohio Department of Education data, every single East Cleveland student (100%) are economically disadvantaged. 27.2% have a Special Education designation which is almost 3 times the state average.

Despite these substantial challenges East Cleveland City Schools have made tremendous progress.

According to their most recent state report card, they saw improvement in 15 of 21 state performance measures.

Their suspension rate has dropped 47.3% over the last three years.

The 5-year graduation rate is 75% which is only ten percentage points below the Ohio average.

The District's Career Tech program earned a "B" in Post Program Outcomes.

The district earned a C on their K-3 literacy rate, which means they were successful in getting struggling readers back on track. Specifically 167 students were identified as being off track and East Cleveland teachers were able to get 81 of those kids back on track.

Their four elementary schools received grades of A, B or C for their Valued Added / Progress measure.

This progress is due to an extremely talented core of teachers and administrators, over 70% of which have a master's degree and they average 15 years of classroom experience.

Have they been successful on all fronts? No. But considering the challenging student population that they are responsible for, they should be lauded for their heroic efforts not subjected to takeover by an out-of-town entity who has zero knowledge of the community and no accountability to East Cleveland voters.

The East Cleveland state takeover was announced at the beginning of the current school year and has already had a negative impact on the academic community. District enrollment has dropped by 12%. As of December, twenty academic positions have not been filled. This number represents the highest number of vacancies in the history of the district. Mid-year school personnel resignations have also exceeded the normal average. What we have seen in the first several months of state control is more chaos and uncertainty injected into an already challenging classroom setting.

While state takeovers have not led to better student achievement outcomes in Youngstown, Lorain and East Cleveland (which should be returned to local control), this legislation focuses on not those three public school districts but rather Ohio's other 608 districts. House Bill 127 is of particular interest to ten Ohio districts who are at high risk of falling under state control. Those ten districts are: Ashtabula City Schools, Canton City Schools, Columbus City Schools, Dayton Public Schools, Euclid City Schools, Lima City Schools, Mansfield City Schools, North College Hill City Schools, Painesville City Schools and Toledo City Schools.

House Bill 70 was originally designed to remove substandard governance and failing leadership but if that was truly the outcome it was trying to prevent, one could theorize that the level of district wealth would not be a factor (or predictor) of which districts would be facing state takeover. However, the reality says otherwise.

As I mentioned, the Ohio Median Household income is \$69,632. The median household income of the three districts that have been taken over are half the Ohio average or lower. East Cleveland is \$19,952, Youngstown is \$24,448 and Lorain is \$35,753. I list the median household income of the ten districts near takeover following my testimony, but all are below the state average, usually by tens of thousands of dollars.

So, while there is evidence that these state takeovers were not deserved and have led to more problems than solutions, perhaps the worst outcome has been that it also hinders the voice of the people by removing local governance. This is not just about the three, or thirteen, current school districts, this is also about Democracy and the grand American experiment.

In America, the right to vote is a fundamental freedom. We are the leading democracy in the world and our election system ought to be free, fair and accessible.

We, serving 11.5 million Ohioans, should be about the cause of advancing the integrity of our elections. There should be no barriers that prevent eligible citizens from having their voice heard. In short, we should be protecting Democracy not preventing it.

Finally, let me share with the Committee part of an editorial from *The Canton Repository* entitled, "Time for Ohio to abolish school takeovers". It was posted online at 9:39AM just two days ago (March 17, 2019) it reads in part, "What began as a noble carrot-and-stick idea, however, has shown little evidence of improving educational outcomes where it is in place: Youngstown, Lorain and East Cleveland. It can be argued, in fact, things are worse, with more parental disconnect, low employee morale and high administration turnover reported in those districts. We urge lawmakers and the governor to end this failed idea."

Mr., Chairman and members of the Committee, that is exactly what House Bill 127 seeks to do.

I believe that every Ohio child can change the world. Perhaps the next great Lordstown innovation is currently in a Youngstown classroom. Perhaps the

solution to the Lake Erie algae crisis is a Lorain student. Perhaps the next great civil rights leader is walking down an East Cleveland school hallway. These kids, our kids, can do great things. But to help ensure their potential is fully realized, local voters should be able to hold local leaders accountable.

We would ask that the Committee support HB 127 and end these state takeovers. We would be happy to answer any questions the Committee might have.

<u>School District</u>	<u>Median Household Income</u>
Ashtabula City Schools	\$41,158
Canton City Schools	\$51,198
Columbus City Schools	\$43,844
Dayton Public Schools	\$52,745
Euclid City Schools	\$35,949
Lima City Schools	\$30,953
Mansfield City Schools	\$33,257
North College Hill City Schools	\$41,841
Painesville City Schools	\$41,652
Toledo City Schools	\$67,730